

Bandwagon

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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THIS MONTH'S COVER

Fifty or sixty years ago a winter's drive through the countryside gave tattered memory to the visits of circuses the prior summer. Daubs remained for months telling of the visit of a circus, but as the cold months continued the paper began to come loose from the sides of barns and fences.

This photo of a billboard on a barn outside Evansville, Indiana, was taken by Karl Kae Knecht during the winter of 1921-1922. The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows had played Evansville on October 1, 1921. Original negative in the Pfening Collection.

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CHS DUES NOTICES

CHS Secretary-Treasurer Edward L. Jones will be mailing the dues and subscription notices in a few weeks for the fiscal year starting May 1, 1977. So that the records can be properly maintained he asks that you not send your dues payment

until you have received your notice and return envelope. Advance payments create problems, so please hold off until you receive your notice.

The officers have authorized an increase of \$1 to the dues, making the cost \$10 for the year starting May 1, 1977. The cost for dues and subscriptions outside the United States will be \$12. Increased postal rates have forced the increases.

CIRCUS PERSONNEL CENSUS-SURVEY

A census survey of active and retired circus personnel on the West Coast of Florida is now underway.

The survey is being conducted by Alva Johnson, Jr., president of the Sarasota Tent of the Circus Fans of America in cooperation with the Ringling Museum of the Circus.

The purpose is first to get an accurate count of circus people in the area for use of those interested in better public relations for these citizens and to achieve more favorable rulings in zoning regulations in Sarasota County, a constant threat.

The census will also provide an accurate file of statistics of circus personnel to be stored in the Museum archives to be available to Circus Historians.

Circus people nationwide are urged to file a survey form which can be obtained by contacting Mr. Johnson at the Ringling Museum of the Circus, P.O. Box 1838, Sarasota, Florida 33578. No mailing lists or commercial use of this survey will be permitted.

HERMAN LINDEN

Herman J. Linden, a long time member of the Circus Historical Society, passed away early in January, 1977. Mr. Linden of Aurora, Illinois, had CHS number 204 and had been a member of the organization for about 30 years.

Mr. Linden had served as President of the Circus Fans Association of America and as its most recent secretary treasurer. He was also a long time member of the National Awards Committee of the Circus Hall of Fame.

CIRCUS PHOTOS

5 Sells-Floto 1927 \$3, 15 Arthur Bros. 1945 \$8, 17 Hagenbeck-Wallace 1938 \$7, 19 Barnes 1929 \$9, 27 Barnes 1928 \$11, 5 Ringling Bros. parade 1903 \$4, 60 Barnes-Floto 38 all wagons \$18, 15 Barnes-Floto 37 \$8, 15 Yankee Patterson 47 \$7, 30 H-W wagons at Compound 1947 \$9, 30 C Beatty 1947 \$9, 34 C Beatty 1949 \$10. For 50¢ tell me the number of the RB&B wagon you want & and I can probably furnish a print, wagon-such as #110, #111 etc. - also most Mack trucks.

Jim McRoberts
1116 W. 18th
Topeka, Kansas 66604



The Sparks Circus - through 1928

By Gordon M. Carver

Foreword

This series of articles on the Sparks Circus from its earliest beginnings under the ownership of John H. Sparks and Charles Sparks through 1928 after which it was sold to the American Circus Corporation has been several years in preparation. Information about its beginnings is very scarce. In its early days it was quite a small show and therefor not very newsworthy. However, with the help of The Billboard news columns and a number of individuals I have been able to piece together a fairly comprehensive picture.

Those to whom I must offer thanks

John H. Sparks posed at the same studio while with the Main show in 1886. Pfening Collection.



John H. Sparks.
With Main Show 1886

are Roger Bernier who located Vera Wiseman, widow of Clifton Sparks (Wiseman), whose knowledge of Charles Sparks and of the show from 1914 through 1928 was of unmatched value; Don Marcks whose Father kept voluminous notes on the circuses that visited in or near his home in Massachusetts in the early 1900's; Bob Parkinson of the Circus World Museum who provided data from their files that is now nowhere else available; Maurice Allaire whose picture collection of this show is one of the best; Al Conover who supplied material from his father's collection; Fred Pfening, Jr., who was generous in providing pictures from his collection; and John Horn whose research of the later years of the show was most helpful. Without these persons what follows would for all practical purposes have been impossible.

The Beginning

Charles Sparks was born, not in the United States, but in England on April 11, 1876. His parents were English music hall performers. He was brought up in the traditions of the stage and at a very early age was himself, a performer, and was still very young when brought to this country. In 1884 at the age of eight he was featured with the Jack Haverly Minstrels, a well-known troupe of that time. A special litho was used to bill him as "The Champion Clog Dancer of the World", quite some recognition for such a young lad.

In due course Charles and his mother arrived in Ogden, Utah, where they took up residence in a hotel favored by theatrical people. It was here that the fateful meeting with John H. Wiseman

This letterhead was used by the Sparks show in 1902. It is printed in blue ink. Pfening collection.

took place. Wiseman was touring with his own musical-vaudeville act and stayed at the same hotel in which the Sparks were living. Charles's skills as a dancer and also as a drummer (for he did this well too) attracted John H. Wiseman and he became quite friendly with Charles and his mother. At that time Mrs. Sparks was seriously ill with tuberculosis making her future in much jeopardy. Being all alone in a strange country she was naturally greatly concerned for the future

Charles Sparks is shown in a studio photo taken while he was with the Walter L. Main Circus in 1886. Pfening Collection.



Charles Sparks, Season of 1886 with Main's Circus



Charles Sparks is pictured here standing behind the drum, with the band of the Haverly Minstrels in 1887. Pfening Collection.

welfare of her son. And so, she asked John H. Wiseman if he would care for him.

The result of this we now know. John H. Wiseman "adopted" Charles Sparks. And more than this, he "adopted" the name of Sparks as well, thereafter being known as John H. Sparks. All the members of Wiseman's family, either then or later, also took the name of Sparks. John H. had four children, Inez, Helen, John, Jr., and Clifton. Of these, only Clifton took to the circus life permanently. It is also interesting that after the death of Charles Sparks the family reverted to the use of the old family name of Wiseman.


After some years in various show business activities, including doing an act along with Charles in the aftershow of the Walter L. Main Circus during the season of 1888, John H. Sparks in 1890 organized his first circus, the Sparks and Allen Wagon Show. This show toured for three seasons, through 1892. In 1893 it became the Sparks and Cole Overland Circus with John H. Sparks and George S. Cole, sole owners. Later Cole dropped out of the partnership and the title, that was to be used for almost ten years, became John H. Sparks Old Virginia Shows. Although in those years it was a small outfit moving by horse and wagon, it was most successful.

By 1900 John H. Sparks had tired of show life and its travel and wanted to settle down, and so at the end of the season he retired from active management of the show and bought a hotel near Winston-Salem, N.C. For the season of 1901 he turned the full management of the show over to Charles Sparks who was then 25 years old. However, for ten years prior to

that Charles had been active in the show, both as a performer and in its management. Clifton Sparks, who was later to become Charles assistant was then only eight years old. John H. Sparks at the same time was being successful in his hotel operation and enlarged it by building a small lake stocked with fish, and adding a small zoo with a good display of wild animals. It was one of the animals, a lion cub, which biting him caused an infection which resulted in his death in 1903. This left Charles Sparks in full control of the show.

In 1903 the show was still moving overland by wagon. It had 78 people, 18 wagons and 62 head of horses. The big top was a 100 foot round top with one 50 foot middle piece. Shortly thereafter in either 1904 or 1905 Charles Sparks, starting his climb to success in the circus world, put his show on rails. In his train was a large tunnel car that was to be a distinctive feature of the show's rail equipment for a number of years. This car was 80 feet long and had small windows along the sides near the roof. The roof was exceptionally arched with prominent air vents. Besides a door in the center of each side there were doors the full width of each

This reserve seat ticket used around 1900 shows a young Charles Sparks, listed as general manager. Pfening Collection.

 <p>Compliments of CHAS. SPARKS, Manager.</p>	<p>JOHN H. SPARKS' OLD RELIABLE VIRGINIA SHOWS.</p> <p>Noted for Its Honesty and Business-Like Methods.</p>	<p>RESERVED SEAT</p>
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John H. Sparks' Two car show, 1898. Mary, the Sparks Trained Elephant. Manager Sparks standing back of Mary with coat on arm, hat in hand.

The full company of the John H. Sparks two car circus is shown in this February 4, 1898, photo taken in York, Ala. Sparks is shown holding his derby hat.

end through which wagons could be loaded. This car carried the show's cages - a couple of pony cages and two cross cages - and the show's small shell bandwagon. Also, it carried performing horses and ponies as well as, that first year, the show's draft stock. Later by 1906, the show's first elephant, Mary, then a baby, was also carried in that car. The first year on rails the train consisted of the tunnel car, one flat and one coach.

By 1906 Sparks circus growth, which was to be almost unabated for the next eighteen years, continued. While still a small one ring show, it was now using six railroad cars, one advance, one coach, one stock, two flats and the large tunnel car which still carried the cages, led stock and now the elephant Mary. The big top was about a 100 foot round top with one 50 and two 30 foot middle pieces. The ring was of the old fashioned dirt curb variety. Bill Curtis, who later held the same job on the Sells-Floto Circus and American Circus Corporation shows, was in charge of getting the tents up and down.

The program had a number of names in it that would later become well-known in the circus world. After a

walk-around of performers and animals, the Kadells were on with a double trapeze act; Mr. Berger, hand balancing; Mr. Ashton, balancing trapeze; Eddie Brown and Billy Reid in a ten minute January act; Hines-Kimball Troupe, which included Jennie Rooney and Mayme Ward, ground acrobatics; Al Millett, hand balancing - he was also boss of props; Minnie Fisher, iron jaw; Eddie Brown, trained ponies; Charles Elliott and Walter Guice on aerial bars - Walter Guice was to be with the Sparks show in bareback and aerial bar acts almost constantly for the life of the show; Mr. Ashton doing slack wire; Archie Falls, clown acrobat; Single elephant - then just a four foot high punk who was later to grow into one of the all time largest circus elephants; Miss Guice, single trapeze; and last, a Pete Jenkins bareback act by Eddie Brown. This program of fourteen numbers, heavily weighted to aerial acts, took about an hour and a half and was typical of the small one ring shows of that day.

The Eddie Brown, named above, besides being in the three acts shown, also sold tickets in the wagon, bought the gasoline for the lights (which was no easy job in those days), led the parade, sometimes took tickets on the side show, worked the "come-in", made concert announcements and sold concert tickets. The concert was a "Roaring Lion" act in a small wire arena by a Mr. Costello who was also the elephant trainer. Such "doubling in brass" was the order of the day in all the small shows then on the road.

No cookhouse was carried. All meals were served in the coach by Addie (Mrs. Charles) Sparks. Admission to the big show was 25¢ for children and 35¢ for adults, with reserved seats another 25¢. The side show was 10¢ as was the concert. Daily expenses ran from \$350 to \$450, and the daily take was from \$600 to \$1,000. Although small, as seen, it was a profitable operation (at least four times greater by today's dollars) and within a year or two another stock car and coach were added to give the train a total of eight cars.

1910 Season

The winter of 1909-10 was spent in the fairgrounds at Shreveport, Louisiana, making further enlargements and improvements in the show. The tunnel car which had been in use for quite a few years was replaced by two 60 foot flat cars making a total of four. Another coach was added making a total of three. Two stock cars and an advance car completed the train. In addition, a number of new wagons were added including some new cages to replace older, smaller ones. The most striking feature acquired was a new 32 whistle steam calliope. It was an 11½ foot wagon, a length quite



This photo showing a balloon ready for ascension on the Spark 1898 lot in York, Ala. Sparks is again with Mary. Pfening Collection.

common on the smaller shows in the days of the 60 foot flats, for it allowed five such wagons to be loaded to a car. It was a Sullivan & Eagle made wagon, similar in design to the Gentry calliopes.

In further reference to the above 11½ foot wagons Sparks had another rather unique wagon length. These were very stubby baggage wagons only 10-9½ feet long. A number of the show's tab wagons were 13½-14 feet long and matched with one of the stubby very short wagons on a flat car were only the equivalent of two of the 11½ foot wagons. They also provided a certain efficiency in loading and spotting the wagons on the lot which was not provided when the baggage or properties of two different departments had to be loaded in one of the larger type wagons, rather than in two of these

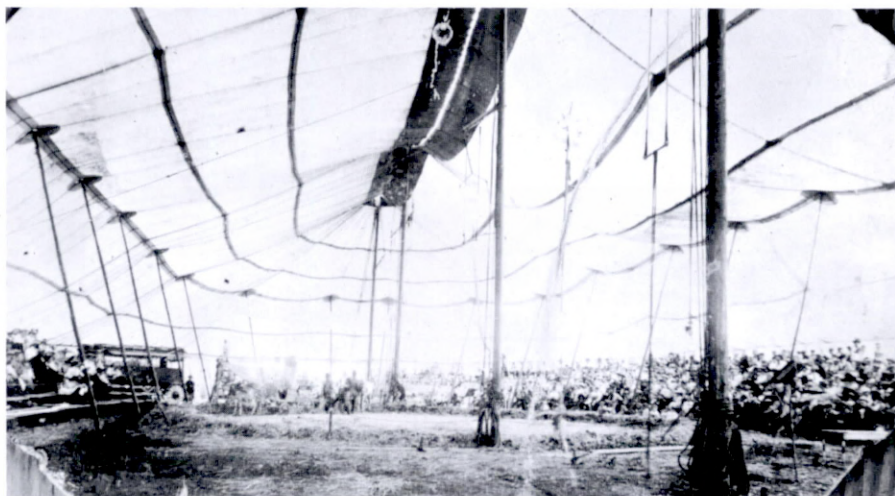
The Sparks 1902 big top appeared to have been about a 100 ft. round top with one 50 ft. middle and two 30 ft. middles. An

smaller ones. Charles Sparks was a very astute manager. As a further note on the wagons in use by the show, at least half of the cages were of the cross cage variety, but the pony cages which had been used prior to 1910 were no longer used by the show.

On Sunday, March 27, the animals were transferred to their new cages. This operation was open to the public and some 2,000 people watched the event. Then the next day the show moved several blocks from the fairgrounds to the circus lot and made ready to open the season. Rehearsals preceded the show opening on Friday and Saturday April 1-2. The cookhouse no longer run by Addie Sparks in one of the coaches, was on the lot under the direction of Charles Davis, and opened for the rehearsal period prior to the start of the season.

On Friday morning at 11 A.M. the first parade of the season moved through the Shreveport business district to good reports by the local paper. That afternoon the 1910 season opened

earthen ring curb is visible. All photos are from the author's collection unless otherwise credited.





with a show, still given in one ring, lasting just under two hours. They now had three elephants, including Mary, who was beginning to be a respectable size. They were trained and performed by Paul Jacoby. The principal performers in the show included, besides the elephants, the Four Valentinos, acrobats; Mrs. Bert Mayo, equestrienne principal rider; La Petite Vivian, ladder act; and Mazuppa Jap troupe of acrobats. The band was now under the direction of Clarence Cooper, who had married Inez Sparks, daughter of John H., was from Vandegrift, Pennsylvania, and later returned there. The after show consisted of performing lions after which the audience was allowed to watch the feeding of the animals (matinee only).

The side show, besides the band and minstrel show, had a lightning calculator, a flying woman (?), small cage of baboons, and a Punch and Judy show. For the next several years six or seven acts in the side show was more or less usual and 10¢ was quite adequate for the mostly rural areas played. Incidentally, the parade was repeated on Saturday. In spite of good newspaper coverage and much urging to support the show because of its wintering at the fairgrounds and supporting the Fair Association which had been in some financial straits, its patronage was not considered to have been what it should.

Route data for 1910 is rather skimpy, in particular for the first and third quarters of the season. After leaving Shreveport we hear nothing of the show until May 27-28 when they were in Caruthersville and Sikeston, Mo. In June they were in Missouri at Flat River 2, Bonne Terre 3, and Crystal City 4; in Illinois at Mendota 9, and Warren 10; in Wisconsin at Darlington 11, Lancaster 16; in Iowa at Dyersville 17, Independence 18, Onawa 23, Storm Lake 24, Esterville 25; and finishing the month in Minnesota at St. James 27, Chaska 28, Glencoe 29 and Olivia 30.

For July we know they were still in

All the cars of the Sparks show in 1904. The tunnel car, 80 ft. long, carried all the stock, the small pony and cross cages and the bandwagon. Behind it is one heavily loaded flat and the single coach, in which the personnel both slept and ate.

Minnesota at Appleton 1, and Wheaton 2; in South Dakota at Britton 7; in North Dakota at Edgeley 8; back in South Dakota at Faulfton 9; then again in North Dakota at Cooperstown 14, Mayville 15 and Larrimore 16. The only dates we have in August are in Montana at Marlowton 18 and Round-up 19. We next hear of them heading south in September in Kansas at Alma 9, and Peabody 10; in Missouri at West Plains 17, Thayer 19; and then into Arkansas at Black Rock 20, Jonesboro 22, Blythesville 23, and Osceola 24.

From this point on route data becomes more complete. In October they were in Mississippi at Emporia 7, Columbus 8; in Georgia at Vienna 19, Ocilla 20, Douglas 21, Nashville 22, Willacooche 23-24, Vidalia 26, Millen 27, Sylvania 28, Statesboro 29 and Garfield 31. In November they continued in Georgia at Glennville 2, Collins 3, Swainsboro 4, Wadley 5, Adrian 6-7, Hawkinsville 9, Wrightsville 10, Sandersville 11, Washington 13-14, Madison 16, Social Circle 17, Buford 18, Commerce 19; then into North Carolina at Franklin 20-21, and back into Georgia at Royston 23, Hartwell 24, and Lavonia 25. They finished the season in North Carolina at Concord 30 and on December 1 at Albemarle. From there they went to Salisbury where they would winter for the next several years.

So far as can be determined the season was an uneventful one. At Blackfoot Mountain east of Kalispell, Montana, in August they were delayed six hours because of a wreck of a train on the Great Northern R.R. Then only about a week later as they were leaving Marlowton, Montana, August 18, the engine derailed, but none of the cars. It was 9 A.M. the next morning before the

engine was back on the tracks and they could proceed. It must be presumed that they lost the next stand.

1911 Season

During 1911 very little concerning the show appeared in *The Billboard*. Even the routes which in those early years were never published completely were most sketchy, and in the September 30 issue it was announced that the show had prohibited publication of the routes and that any mail for the show or personnel should be sent to *The Billboard* and it would be forwarded. The reason for this taboo or prohibition by the show was not indicated or hinted at in any way. And since the show published routes at most a week in advance, it does not seem that they were doing this for fear that other shows would get into towns ahead of them. However, we have been able to obtain the full route, and they will be found elsewhere.

Evidently substantial changes in the staff were planned for this season for in the January 14 *The Billboard* a want advertisement appeared asking for people in virtually every department of the show. Needed were performers, bosses, band leader (in spite of this apparently Clarence Cooper returned for one more season), side show manager and people, side show band leader and band, cookhouse people, advance agents and billers.

From sketchy notes we know that Fletcher Smith was press agent ahead of the show. Bill Curtis had left for Sells-Floto Circus, a considerably larger show than Sparks, where he was Supt. of Canvas. His old job was handled by "Kid" Fletcher and Jim Jacobs was boss hostler. Bert Mayo continued his association with the show, which was to last many years, as Equestrian Director and horse trainer. His wife did riding. A Les Bartlett played the steam calliope while his wife did a single trapeze act and one on

the flying rings. Paul Jacoby was the elephant trainer, but he left in mid-season for we find the show advertising in the August 26 *The Billboard* for an "elephant man to work three elephants, well broke and gentle". Mary had not yet started to turn bad. This help wanted ad, the only one placed during the season, also asked for "a man to handle Bolte & Weyer lights". These were the best known circus gas lights of the time and widely used on circuses.

The Petel family of five acrobats and the Crandalls who performed in various riding and acrobatic numbers were a strong part of the program. Other performers were Vivian Cahill, Roy Kelly and Cole Melzno. The clown contingent consisted of only four - Joe Sherry who was the principal clown and Joseph McAllister, Mr. Stoddard and Mr. Wallace who assisted.

Fritz Brunner was now performing the two lions in the concert. This act was given in a small twelve foot square light weight wire arena that loaded on the side of the cage wagon and was very easy and quick to erect and dismantle. Much like in today's circuses, the cage wagon was backed right up to the side of the arena and the two lions moved directly from their cage into the arena.

So far as we know the performance was still given in one ring. We believe that the big top was about a 90 foot round with a 40 foot middle flanked by either 20 or 30 foot middles. No performance took place under these end middle pieces. They merely served to make room for more seats in the top.

The parade was noteworthy in that for a 10 car show (with only nine cars back to carry the show proper) it had a steam calliope for use in the parade. A picture of this wagon appeared in the December 16, 1911 *Billboard*. It was very similar to, if not one of, the Gentry calliopes. We do not know whether this was the first or second year on the show but it is unlikely that it was there earlier. It was pulled by a four horse team.

There are reports of only three untoward events occurring during the season. On Sunday, July 9, at Norway, Maine, a severe electrical storm swept over large parts of Maine including Norway. The side show was blown down but not badly damaged. The cookhouse and big top while not blown down were badly torn. The big top was lowered and re-erected with only two poles. A new big top which was on order was immediately telegraphed for and arrived in a few days. The only other tops that were damaged were the horse tops which only received a few tears.

Then just a week and a half later enroute from Cherryfield, Maine, to Old Town for July 20 the engine pulling the train, ten miles from Bangor, blew its cylinder head. While they were

delayed a couple of hours in arriving and the show was only a little late and business was big.

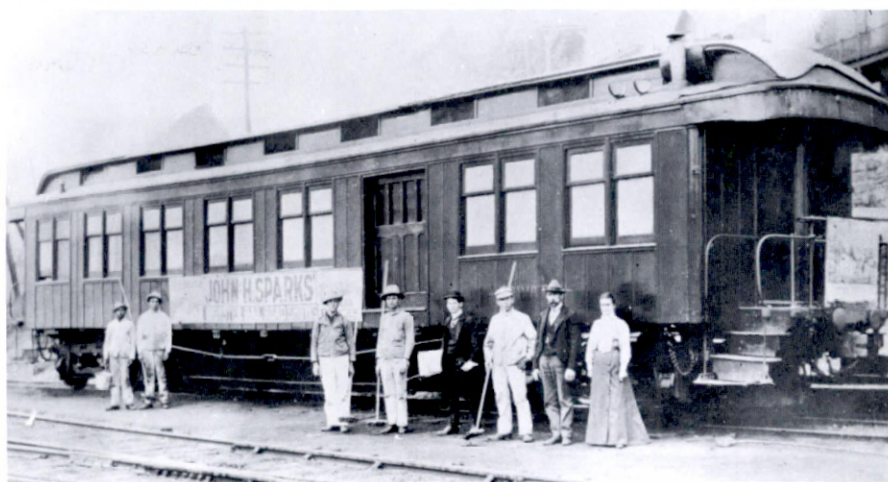
The other event occurred on a Sunday run near the end of the season in Florida. On the run from Eustice to Sanford two flats were derailed and the wagons and cars badly damaged. Six A.C.L. Ry. - the road on which the accident occurred - box cars were obtained and quickly loaded with the properties from the destroyed wagons. The show was able to open its doors on time on Monday. How they managed the rest of the season we do not know.

At the end of November the Danny Robinson Circus which had folded earlier had its show properties auctioned off. Charles Sparks was reported to have been a heavy buyer but *The Billboard* did not give any specifics of just what he acquired. However, pictures of the show taken in the years closely following lead one to suspect that his purchases consisted of some tableau wagons and possibly some cages.

The season ended at Bronson, Florida, on December 16 making it a long one of eight months and one week. It was said to have covered eighteen states and 20,000 miles. They played in North Carolina, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine (they stayed four weeks in this state, longer than in any other state), Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia and Florida (five weeks here). Detailed routes will be found elsewhere. It was a long and highly successful season for this small ten car show. Most of the towns played were small and some were hardly more than cross roads, particularly in the deep south, yet they made money.

John H. Sparks Shows Route For 1911

The first advance car owned by Sparks, photo taken in 1902 before the title had been painted on the sides.



Salisbury, N.C. April 15; Mooresville 17; Taylorsville 18; Mocksville 19; Western-Salem 20; Vartinsville, Va. 21; Spray, N.C. 22; Danville, Va. 24; So. Boston 25; Durham, N.C. 26; Roxboro 27; Lynchburg, Va. 28; Lexington 29; Clifton Forge May 1; Hinton, W. Va. 2; Ronover 3; Marlinton 4; Durbin 5; Belington 6; Weston 8; Buckhannon 9; Phillippi 10; Kingwood 11; Shinnston 12; Mannington 13; Hundred 15; Cameron 16; Bellaire, Ohio 17; Wellsburg, W. Va. 18; Cadiz, Ohio 19; McDonald, Pa. 20; Cannonsburg 22; Carnegie 23; McKees Rock 24; Elwood City 25; Woodlawn 26; Monessen 27; Brownsville 29; Donora 30; Turtle Creek 31; East Brady June 1; Bethlehem 2; Reynoldsville 3; Austin 5; Galeton 6; Westfield 7; Wellsboro 8; Mansfield 9; Bloomsburg 10; Waverly, N.Y. 12; Towanda, Pa. 13; Wyalusing 14; Tunkhannock 15; Honesdale 16; Susquehanna 17; Glenn Falls, N.Y. 19; Ticonderoga 20; Whitehall 21; Bellows Falls, Vt. 22; Keene, N.H. 23; Nashua 24; Concord 26; Franklin 27; Lacombe 28; Plymouth 29; Woodsville 30; Littleton July 1; Lancaster 3; Berlin 4; Bethel, Maine 5; Norway 6; Yarmouth 7; Rockland 8; New Castle 10; Gardiner 11; Belfast 12; Pittsfield 13; Ellsworth 14; Machias 15; Calais 17; Eastport 18; Cherryfield 19; Oldtown 20; Milo 21; Millenochet 22; Houlton 24; Ashland 25; Fort Kent 26; Madawaska 27; Van Buren 28; Caribon 29; Fort Fairfield 31; Presque Isle August 1; Island Falls 2; Dover 3; Skowhegan 4; Rumford Falls 5; North Conway, N.H. 7; Colebrook 8; Whitefield 9; Lisbon 10; Lebanon 11; Claremont 12; Newport 14; Brattleboro, Vt. 15; Granville, N.Y. 16; Port Henry 17; Keesville 18; Apasable Forks 19; Plattsburg 21; Lake Placid 22; Saranac Lake 23; Tupper Lake 24; Fulton Chain 25; Palmyra 26; Gowando 28; Cambridge Springs, Pa. 29; Wardsworth, Ohio 30; Ashland 31; Richwood, Sept. 1; Mt. Sterling 2; Brownstown, Ind. 4; Flora, Ill. 5; Salem 6; Sparta 7; Flat River, Mo. 8; Bonne Terre 9; Lutesville, Mo. 11; Fredericktown 12; Ironton 13; Piedmont 14; Doniphan 15; Corning, Ark. 16; Morley, Mo. 18; Bloomfield 19; Malden 20; Kennett 21; Marked Tree Ark 22; Harrisburg 23; Mariana 25; Clarendon 26; Wynne 27; Earle 28; Augusta 29; Beebe 30; Malvern, October 2; Prescott 3; Amity 4; Womble 5; Gurdon 6; Strong 7; Rayville, La. 9; Winanboro 10; Portland, Ark. 11; Hamburg 12; Warren 13; Dumas 14; Dermott 16; Lake Village 17; Lake Providence, La. 18; Tullulah 19; Natchez, Miss. 20; Utica 21; Ruleville 23; Summer 24; Charleston 25; Tehula 26; Lexington 27; Acherman 28; Union 30; Bay Springs 31; Richton, November 1; Bay Minette, Ala. 2; Atmore 3; Brewton 4; Evergreen 6; Geneva 7; Floralla 8; DeFuniak Springs, Fla. 9; Chipley 10; Marianna 11; Bainbridge, Ga. 13; Colquitt 14; Quincy, Fla. 15; Tallahassee 16; Madison 17; Lake City 18; Newberry 20; Dunnellon 21; Inverness 22; Brooksville 23; Leesburg 24; Mulberry 25; Bradentown 27; Plant City 28; Lakeland 29; Wauchula 30; Arcadia December 1; Bartow 2; Kissimmee 4; Orlando 5; Eustis 6; Sanford 7; DeLand 8; Palatka 9; New



Symrna 11; Daytona 12; St. Augustine 13; Fernandina 14; Starke 15; Bronson 16.

"HOME SWEET HOME"

Winterquarters Salisbury, N.C.

A wreck of the Spark's train at Troy, N.C., December 2, 1906. The one flat and stock were derailed as well as the single coach. The train now had a total of four cars plus the advance car.

1912 Season

The season opened at Salisbury, North Carolina, Thursday, April 11. So far as we can tell the show had not enlarged over the winter and was still on nine cars back with one in advance. The consist was the same, four 60 foot flats, two stocks and the three coaches. No news about the activities in winter-quarters had appeared in *The Billboard* over the winter months and the first we hear of it is the review of the opening. This incidentally is the first time *The Billboard* had given the show this much attention so we may assume that its reputation was growing.

The Billboard called this the 27th annual opening of the John H. Sparks Show which probably would represent the time from which Charles Sparks became associated with John H. Wiseman. Going forward from this would mean that from then through its last season on the road, 1931, would have given it 47 seasons of which Charles Sparks was associated with it for 44 seasons. In any event it got off to an auspicious start as all the businesses in Salisbury and the neighboring town of Spencer closed for the day and the local Elks Lodge occupied one whole section of the reserved seats. The parade, said to be the most elaborate ever presented by the show, undoubtedly enhanced by the new equipment that Sparks had bought the previous Fall at the auction of the Danny Robinson Show, "was viewed by thousands and the big top was crowded at both afternoon and evening performances".

The program under the direction of Equestrian Director Bert Mayo was given in a four pole top with all acts given in the one center ring, except for three given in the two spaces on either side of the center ring - these were displays 4, 17 and 18. All the other acts were singles performed in or over the

center ring. The detailed program is as follows:

- No. 1 - Grand entry
- No. 2 - Modern Art Statuary by the Six Waltons
- No. 3 - Acrobatic act, Sherry and Connors
- No. 4 - Wire artistes, Beere & Hicks and Victoria Biggs
- No. 5 - Myrtle Mayo riding her high school horse "Bird"
- No. 6 - Miss Lizzie Cohn - aerial act over center ring - end "rings" had Miss Josie Partlett and Miss Helen Nelson
- No. 7 - Prof. Lewis Reed - elephants
- No. 8 - Baseball clowns - Mssrs. Sherry, McAllister, Stoddard, Biggs, Wallace, Connors and Culbertson
- No. 9 - Barre and Hicks - head dives from the high ladder
- No. 10 - Troupe of trained Arabian horses presented by Myrtle Mayo
- No. 11 - High air performance by the Flying Nelsons
- No. 12 - Equestrian bareback performance by Bert Mayo
- No. 13 - Comedy number by the clowns (6), headed by Joseph V. Sherry and including Joe McAllister, Stoddard, Biggs Wallace, Cyrus Connors and Claude Culbertson
- No. 14 - Somersaulting by the Walton troupe
- No. 15 - Hezekiah, the laughable arenic comedy concert with Bert Mayo and Sherry
- No. 16 - Aerial performances suspended by the teeth, the Loretta Sisters
- No. 17 - Lofty revolving trapeze and aerial contortion performances by Pete Nelson and Lizzie Guice
- No. 18 - Animal display; Cyclone, the bucking and kicking mule; Bert Mayo's creation in which a pony runs the revolving tables with rapidity

This program had much more variety than that of the previous year. Prof. B. E. Taylor's concert band furnished

the music for the show. For the aftershow Herr Brunner was again performing the two lions. The outstanding crowd pleasers were the Waltons, the Nelsons, Lizzie Guice, Myrtle and Bert Mayo and Lewis Reed's performing elephants. And Herr Brunner kept a substantial crowd for the after show.

But perhaps a review written by a local newspaper man best captures the quality of this relatively small one ring show. Morristown, New Jersey, in 1912, a county seat, was a town of about 8,000 and was in those times usually visited by at least two shows of the one or two ring size. Sparks was to be there Saturday, May 4 and was to be followed in sixteen days by Frank A. Robbins Circus, a two ring show, which was putting on a heavy "Wait" campaign. So we can assume the town knew its circuses.

The review said, "The show while one of the oldest on the road comes almost as a stranger here, but from all appearances this morning it lacks nothing in size or equipment for the special train, wagons, horses and in fact the entire outfit looked neat and trim and had all the earmarks of a good circus. When the parade came out this morning it served to still further guarantee the show's excellence.

"The parade was good, in fact would have done credit to any show in the country (Ed. note: that is high praise indeed). The costumes were rich and tasty, the cages, tableaux and floats of exceeding beauty, the open dens revealed splendid specimens of the jungle, the lady riders were handsome and beautifully gowned and presented an air of refinement not usually seen with the ordinary circus. (Ed. note: perhaps this was Charles Sparks high standards in evidence). There was plenty of music with three bands and a steam calliope, and enough fun was created by the clown band and mounted jesters to set the little folks dancing with delight. The trappings, harness and uniforms were all new and the horses really the finest ever seen in a circus parade here. The full-blooded Arabians came in for much attention

and Big Mary (Ed. note: Spark's oldest elephant) loomed up like a mountain in her gaudy headpiece. (Ed. note: Sparks never, at least in the early days, had his elephants wear advertising banners in the parade as did many of the shows). All in all it was an entirely satisfactory parade and was well worth seeing".

This review of the parade is perhaps about as laudatory as any written by a non-press agent as I have ever seen. It gives a remarkable feel for this custom of a bygone era. It also gives weight to the reputation that Charles Sparks had, of always maintaining his equipment in glistening appearance and keeping his performers costumes in good order. He knew the importance of these factors in getting a good reputation for his show.

After the above review of the parade the afternoon performance came in for its share of praise too. The reviewer made particular mention of: "the revolving table stunt, with the little pony running at breakneck speed, was something new. ***The elephants that danced, played musical instruments and participated in an actual bowling contest were great, and the high backward dives by a man and a woman from the top of the tent was a positive thriller. An acrobatic troupe (the Waltons) of 6 people accomplished seeming impossible feats *** One of them made a perfect double somersault from the shoulder of one man to another. *** All in all it was a good clean show and deserves a packed tent tonight." The Robbins show which came a couple of weeks later received no reviews whatsoever. An interesting comparison of the shows.

The side show was typical for the time and size of show. There were no "freaks", only novelty acts. It was under the management of Harry H. Hall who also did a needle act, that is threaded a pack of needles in his mouth. The other acts were Turner's Jubilee Minstrels and Band; Howard, magician; Madame Cora, mind reader; Bessie Hart, soubrette; Prof. Lionettes, floating lady; Miss Hilda, snake charmer; and Fred Monnech, marionettes; eight acts for ten cents. And there were four men out front selling tickets.

Aside from the review of the opening and a short article covering the wind-up of the season only one other notice of the show appeared in *The Billboard* during the season. This was the menu of the July 4th dinner served to the show's personnel Thursday noon at Littleton, New Hampshire. The Fourth of July on circuses was a kind of Christmas day for show folks and all shows celebrated by a big dinner. How a show the size of Sparks with its limited cookhouse facilities could serve this kind of a dinner is something of a puzzle, but they did. Here is the menu as published in *The*



The shell bandwagon of Sparks Circus in 1910. This wagon was used by the show from about 1905 through possibly 1912.

Billboard: - Roman cocktail; Julienne consomme; sliced tomatoes, olives, cucumbers; baked bluefish with anchovie sauce; fried smelts with tartar sauce; roast young turkey with cranberry sauce; Philadelphia capon with cream gravy; fresh peas, new string beans, potatoes in cream sauce; Waldorf salad, cold ham, asparagus ambush; Charlotte custard, assorted fruit, strawberry ice cream, jelly rolls, Roquefort cheese, mixed nuts. The cooks must certainly have put in a hard morning preparing that feed.

The route, which, except for a few scattered periods, is quite complete appears elsewhere. This year, so far as we know, is the first time the show did not go into the midwest. It went up the East coast into New England never getting further west than West Virginia and Pennsylvania nor further

south than South Carolina. From the available route data the show played 44 dates in New York state and 47 in the states of Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine.

The advance car closed the season at Rock Hill, South Carolina, Saturday, November 16, with the show due to make this its last stop two weeks later, November 30. The advance crew had consisted of T. W. Ballenger, general agent; F. M. Heaton, local contractor; C. S. Clarke, car manager with fourteen men, including the chef. While they only had one advance car, they did have one man, James Randolph, brigade agent, who was available to handle some opposition work when it was necessary.

After closing what was apparently a most successful 1912 season in Rock Hill, the show moved directly to its winterquarters in Salisbury, North Carolina.

John H. Sparks Shows Route for 1912

This picture of the Sparks band was taken in Claremont, N.H., on August 12, 1911. C. H. Cooper, bandleader is standing behind the bass drum. The Dragon and Mirror tab wagon was used on the show at least through 1920.

Salisbury, N.C. April 11; High Point 12; Burlington 13; Sunday; Durham 15; Roxboro 16; So. Boston, Va. 17; Lynchburg 18; Lexington 19; Staunton 20; Sunday; Harrisonburg 22; Woodstock 23; Winchester 24; Martinsburg W. Va. 25; Chambersburg, Pa. 26; Carlisle 27; Sunday; West Chester 29; Perth Amboy, N.J. 30; Somerville May 1; Dover 2; Newton 3;



Morristown 4; Sunday; Nyack, N.Y. 6; Haverstraw 7; Suffern 8; Newburg 9; Saugerties 10; Catskill 11; Sunday; Hudson 13; Hoosick Falls 14; N. Adams, Mass. 15; Shelburne Falls 16; Greenfield 17; Athol 18; Sunday; Gardner 20; Winchendon 21; Keene, N.H. 22; Hillsboro 23; Milford 24; Derry 25; Sunday; Exeter 27; Dover 28; Portsmouth 29; Sanford, Maine 30; Westbrook 31; Rockland June 1; Sunday; Rumford Falls 3; Farmington 4; Madison 5; Belfast 6; Dover 7; Millinockett 8; Sunday; Houlton 10; Ft. Fairfield 11; Presque Isle 12; Caribou 13; Van Buren 14; Fort Kent 15; Sunday; Ashland 17; Island Falls 18; Milo 19; Old Town 20; Danforth 21; Lincoln 22; Sunday; Calais 24; Eastport 25; Michais 26; Cherryfield 27; Dexter 28; Skowhegan 29; Sunday; Bath, July 1; N. Conway, N.H. 2; Lancaster 3; Littleton 4; Libson 5; Woodsville 6; Sunday; Plymouth 8; Laconia 9; Franklin Falls 10; Lebanon 11; Newport 12; Claremont 13; Sunday; Brattleboro, Vt. 15; Palmer, Mass. 16; Willimantic, Conn. 17; Bristol 18; Torrington 19; Ansonia 20; Sunday; Hempstead, N.Y. 22; Glen Cove 23; Pt. Jefferson 24; Huntington 25; Riverhead 26; Greenport 27; Sunday; Sag Harbor 29; S. Hampton 30; Patchogue 31; Bay Shore August 1; Babylon 2; Freeport 3; Sunday; Port Jervis 5; Ellenville 6; Liberty 7; Roscoe 8; Margaretville 9; Hancock 10; Sunday; Delhi 12; Walton 13; New Berlin 14; Hamilton 15; Oneida 16; Fort Plain 17; Sunday; Saranac Lake 19; Tupper Lake 20; St. Regis Falls 21; Gouverneur 22; Carthage 23; Harrisville 24; Sunday; Lowville 26; Redwood 27; Cape Vincent 28; Adam 29; Camden 30; Cazenovia 31; Sunday; Ithaca September 2; Towanda, Pa. 3; Montrose 4; Tunkhamock 5; Manch Chunk 6; Phillipsburg, N.J. 7; Sunday; Denton, Md. 9; Cambridge 10; Salisbury 11; Crisfield 12; Princess Ann 13; Cape Charles, Va. 14; Sunday; Franklin 16; Lawrenceville 17; South Hill 18; Oxford, N.C. 19; Chase City, Va. 20; Reidsville, N.C. 21; Sunday; Mt. Airy, 23; Pilot Mt. 24; No. Wilkesboro 25; Elkin 26; Cooleemee 27; Mooresville 28; Sunday; Statesville 30; Hickory October 1; Lenoir 2; Gastonia 3; Lincoln 4; Rutherfordton 5; Sunday; Caroleen 7; Shelby 8; Monroe 9; Wadesboro 10; Albermarle 11; Lexington 12; Sunday; Ashboro 14; Troy 15; Carthage 16; Aberdeen 17; Rockingham 18; Lumberton 19; Sunday; Laurinburg 21; Sanford 22; Red Springs 23; Benson 24; Smithfield 25; Spring Hope 26; Sunday; Enfield 28; Scotland Neck 29; Williamston 30; Robersonville 31; Freemont November 1; Mt. Olive 2; Sunday; Clinton 4; Wallace 5; Wilmington 6; Chadbourn 7; Conway, S.C. 8; Loris 9; Sunday; Fairmont, N.C. 11; Mullins, S.C. 12; Timmons ville 13; Harts ville 14; Lake City 15; Kingstree 16; Sunday; Georgetown 18; Manning 19; Elloree 20; Allendale 21; St. George 22; Springfield 23; Sunday; Edgefield 25; Batesburg 26; Bamberg 27; St. Matthews 28; Lancaster 29; Rock Hill 30.

"HOME SWEET HOME"

Season of 1913

Several of the staff on the 1912 show were rehired for the 1913 season. T. W. Ballenger was again General Agent; F. M. Heaton, contracting agent; James Randolph, special agent; and C. S. Clarke, manager of the advance car #1. Fletcher Smith was to handle press on the show. Others who would return were James Caskey, boss canvasman; Jim Jacobs, boss hostler; Tom Jacobs, trainmaster; and Harry Hall, manager of the side show, his third year with the show.

Through the early months of the year fairly regular notices of the show, unlike previous years, appeared in *The Billboard*. If we can believe all that was said the show was to be overwhelmed with tag wagons. In



The 1913 Sparks big top was a 100 ft. round top with three 40 ft. middles. The pole and stringer wagon had been used and would continue to be on the show for many years.

January it was announced that an order had been placed, with whom was not specified, for three new tab wagons. This, added to what the show had acquired in 1912 from the Robinson show would give them far more than a ten car show with only four flats, which they still were, would be expected or even able to carry. Perhaps the answer to this is that some of these recently acquired tab wagons had

This newspaper ad was used during the 1913 season and continued to be used as late as the 1917 season. Pfening Collection.

(Season of 1913.)

Circus Day

IN TALLAHASSEE

Friday, Nov. 14

One Mile Long Free Street Parade

MORAL ENTERTAINING AND INSTRUCTIVE.

SPARKS

WORLD-FAMOUS SHOWS

25 YEARS OF HONEST DEALING WITH THE PUBLIC.

A TREMENDOUS EXHIBITION OF WEALTH AND SPLENDOR

PERFECT SPECIMENS OF THE RAREST AND CURIOUS CREATIONS GATHERED TOGETHER IN ONE IMMENSE MENAGERIE

THE CHAMPIONS OF ALL COUNTRIES COMPETE IN FEATS OF DARING AND GRACE.

THE PRINCIPAL SALARIES PAID BY THE MAMMOTH ENTERPRISE ARE WORTH ALLIANCE OF THE MOST VALUABLE ARTISTS.

MALE AND FEMALE RIDERS, AERIAL ARTISTS, LEAPERS, TUMBLERS, GYMNASTS AND SENSATIONAL BURNING FEATS OF SKILL AND DARING BY BOTH MALE AND FEMALE PERFORMERS.

A BIG TROUPE OF HIGH-SPRING HORSES.

THE WORLD'S BEST GROUP OF EDUCATED SEALS AND SEA LIONS.

AN IMMENSE

Two Shows of Finest: BARK, MAN-KILLING LIONS PERFORMING IN SHIP STEEL, JUNGLES, ETC.

20 FUNNY CLOWNS

5000 SEATS THAT WILL COMFORTABLY SEAT 5000 PEOPLE.

TENTS THAT ARE POSITIVELY WATERPROOF.

TWO TRAINS OF MONSTER RAILWAY CARS.

A GRAND, FREE, STREET PARADE DAILY AT 10:30 A.M.

THE SHOW THAT NEVER BROKE A PROMISE.

"MARY"

THE LARGEST, LIVING, LAND ANIMAL ON EARTH.

3 INCHES TALLER THAN JUMBO AND WEIGHING OVER 5 TONS.

A POSITIVE FEATURE AT EACH EXHIBITION.

TWO PERFORMANCES DAILY - RAIN OR SHINE.

2 AND 3 O'CLOCK SAT. 12 AND 3 P.M. SUNDAY 11 AND 2 P.M.

either been disposed of or were found to be in too bad shape to be continued in use for we come across a mention of the fact that (only) one of the old tab wagons was being redecorated and painted. If all had been available or useable it would seem that all should have been so treated. It was also mentioned that Charles Sparks had also bought some equipment (presumably not tab wagons) at the auction of the Walter L. Main Circus in late January.

As in the previous year the show opened in Salisbury, North Carolina, to much local fanfare, on Thursday, April 10. Again the Elks sponsored the date and headed the parade as it marched through downtown at noon. And again all schools and places of business were closed at mid-day to see the parade and later go to the performance. Many people came into Salisbury from surrounding towns and it was estimated that at least five thousand people saw the parade. As to the parade, *The Billboard's* local correspondent said it was all "brand new as regards wardrobe, trappings, tableaux and most of the cages." So this may substantiate the earlier reports of the acquisition of new parade equipment. It certainly seems apparent that Sparks was trying to upgrade his show.

After the parade, for those who followed it to the lot, something new was added. This year for the first time there was an "outside free attraction". The Great Reynard rode a unicycle blindfolded down a steep incline from the top of one of the tents. Also, the side show attracted a large patronage. The attractions were mostly holdovers from 1912. Manager Harry Hall had the Turner's Jubilee Minstrels and the Flying Lady as his principal attractions, plus a magician, a needle king and a snake charmer. The menagerie was said to have ten cages (an obvious exaggeration - probably five or six wagons, each with two sections) with the principal feature being the cage of seals and sea lions.

As in most previous years, the program, as such, was not given in *The Billboard*. Rather there was just a listing of the principal acts. However, since it was still given in one ring this probably serves the purpose just as well as a detailed in order listing. The outstanding new act this year was Capt. Wesley's trained seals and sea



lions. A new cage with a drop bottom containing the water tank was used for these animals and continued in use until it was destroyed in a train wreck in 1921. Also getting special mention were the three baseball playing elephants under the tutelage of Lewis Reed.

The rest of the program consisted of the Valentine family of acrobats doing two numbers; Guice family in an aerial act; Walter Guice and Flora Bedini in a bareback act - this was a new venture for Walter Guice for up to now he had confined himself to aerial work; Lizzie Guice, aerialist; the Erminas, contortionist and tight wire acts; the Reynards, unicyclists; Myrtle Mayo and her group of Arabian liberty horses; Miss Bartelle, aerialist; the Fisher Sisters, iron jaw suspension act; and the pony on the revolving table. Stoddard and Wallace were producing clowns assisted by Young and Marsh and others in the program in a series of clown numbers. Jack Phillips, starting a long tenure with the show, had a band of fourteen musicians for the big show. Including the Grand Entry there were, with probably three clown numbers, eighteen displays in the program giving them a running time of probably about an hour and three quarters, the usual for a show of this size and their standard. Fritz Brunner again had his lions as the feature for the concert.

After the evening show a reception was given to Charles Sparks and the officials of the show by the Elks at their club rooms. Among the others who attended who had been helpful in making the opening so successful were Mrs. Charles (Addie) Sparks, Clifton Sparks, John H. Sparks, Jr., Fletcher Smith, and Bert Mayo. About midnight the show was loaded and left for Greensboro.

Before the season had started it had been noted that it would go up the Atlantic coast into New England following much the same route as it had in 1912. However, this was not to be for as will be seen from the route

This 1913 view shows the midway and three pole menagerie top as well as the bannerline on the left. The Two Seahorse tab wagon is at the right of the marquee being used as a ticket wagon.

printed elsewhere, by their seventh stand they were in West Virginia and moving into the midwest where they stayed through August before they started south. While they probably had some opposition during the season the only mention we find of any is of them being one day ahead of the Yankee Robinson show, a strong grift outfit, at Virginia, Minnesota, on Tuesday, July 15.

There was only one serious episode reported during the season. On Sunday morning, June 22, enroute to Minnising, Michigan, Sparks private car caught fire. The car was totally destroyed for a loss of about \$10,000. The clothes of about 60 people were lost. While property damage was high there were no injuries. Clifton Sparks saved about \$3,000 in cash from his locker. The Northwestern R.R. on whose road the accident occurred loaned Sparks a 72 foot steel coach for as long as he needed it but that was not for long. A new Pullman sleeper "Import" was purchased in Chicago immediately for \$7,000 and delivered at Hancock, Michigan, on June 27, five days later.

The season closed Saturday, November 29, at Kershaw, South Carolina, and they immediately moved to Salisbury. The season consisted of 201 stands, in thirty-three and a half weeks covering 18 states and 11,066 miles for an average of 55 miles per move. The season was reported to have been a steady winner with only one week on the books as a loser due mostly to poor weather and crop conditions. Also there were practically no staff changes during the season which seems over the years to have been fairly typical of this show.

Just before the end of the season a new car was purchased to be converted into an up-to-date advance car. It was also announced that 1914 would see the performance given on a center stage

and in two rings. This was a big move upward for the show.

Sparks Circus Route Season of 1913

Salisbury, N.C. April 10; Greensboro 11; Chatham, Va. 12; Sunday; Danville 14; Altavista 15; Salem 16; Princeton, W. Va. 17; Matoaka, 18; Tours 19; Sunday; Glen Jean 21; Peckley 22; Quinnimont 23; Hinton 24; Alderson 25; Marlinton 26; Sunday; Elkins 28; Burnsville 29; Richwood 30; Sutton May 1; Weston 2; Buckhannon 3; Sunday; Moorefield 5; Petersburg 6; Romney 7; Piedmont 8; Grafton 9; Mannington 10; Sunday; Barnesville, Ohio 12; Cambridge 13; Utica 14; Mt. Vernon 15; London 16; Union City, Ind. 17; Sunday; Hartford City, Indiana 19; Monticello, 20; Rensselaer 21; Blue Island, Illinois 22; Maywood 23; Rochelle 24; Sunday; Mendota 26; Polo 27; Manchester, Iowa 28; Independence 29; Parkersburg 30; Lake Mills 31; Sunday; Blue Earth, Minnesota June 2; Windom 3; Laverne 4; St. James 5; Fairfax 6; Madison 7; Sunday; New Richmond, Wis. 9; Amory, 10; Barron 11; Ladysmith 12; Marshfield 13; Waupaca 14; Sunday; Sturgeon Bay 16; Algoma 17; Kewaunee 18; Seymour 19; New London 20; Oconto 21; Sunday; Minnising, Michigan 23; Marquette 24; Baraga 25; Calumet 26; Hancock 27; Republic 28; Sunday; Escanaba 30; Iron Mountain July 1; Chrystal Falls 2; Iron River 3; Ironwood 4; Eagle River, Wis. 5; Sunday; Grandon 7; Rhinelander 8; Merrill 9; Tomahawk 10; Park Falls 11; Mellen 12; Sunday; Coleraine, Minnesota 14; Virginia 15; Evaloth 16; Biwabic 17; Ely 18; Two Harbors 19; Sunday; Ellsworth, Wisconsin 21; Augusta 22; Edgar 23; Wittenberg 24; Denmark 25; Brillion 26; Sunday; Ludington, Michigan 28; Manistee 29; Traverse City 30; Charlevoix 31; Petoskey August 1; Boyne City 2; Sunday; Gaylord 4; Cheboygan 5; Onsway 6; Alpena 7; East Tawas 8; Caro 9; Sunday; Shebensing 11; Bad Axe 12; Harbor Beach 13; Sandusky 14; Marlette 15; Midland 16; Sunday; Charlotte 18; Hastings 19; South Haven 20; Dowagiac 21; Three Rivers 22; Tecumseh 23; Sunday; Napoleon, Ohio 25; Greenfield 26; Wilmington 27; Hillsboro 28; Georgetown 29; Peebles 30; Sunday; Ironton September 1; Vanceburg, Kentucky 2; Maysville 3; Flemingsburg 4; Carlisle 5; Richmond 6; Sunday; Lebanon 8; Greensburg 9; Campbellsville 10; Lancaster 11; London 12; Williamsburg 13; Sunday; Jellico, Tennessee 15; Coak Creek 16; Marysville 17; Madisonville 18; Athens 19; Cleveland 20; Sunday; S. Pittsburg 22; Winchester 23; Fayetteville 24; Lewisburg 25; Columbia 26; Lawrenceburg 27; Sunday; Pulaski 29; Mt. Pleasant 30; Springfield October 1; Elkton, Kentucky 2; Paris, Tennessee 3; Humboldt 4; Sunday; Henderson 6; Selmer 7; Boonville, Mississippi 8; Baldwin 9; Okalona 10; Calhoun City 11; Sunday; Houston 13; Tupelo 14; New Albany 15; Holly Springs 16; Water Valley 17; Grenada 18; Sunday; Winona 20; Eupora 21; Columbus 22; Aliceville, Alabama 23; Geiger 24; York 25; Sunday; Demopolis 27; Greensboro 28; Marion 29; Thomasville 30; Uniontown 31; Camden November 1; Sunday; Evergreen 3; Greenville 4; Andalusia 5; Geneva 6; Florala 7; DeFuniak Springs, Florida 8; Sunday; Panama City 10; Chipley 11; Blountstown 12; Marianna 13; Tallahassee 14; Madison 15; Sunday; Nashville, Georgia 17; Bashman 18; McDonough 19; Villa Rica 20; Winder 21; Comer 22; Sunday; Abbeville, S.C. 24; Clinton 25; Chester 26; Winnsboro 27; Lancaster 28; Kershaw 29; SEASON ENDS 30.

Over 110 CHS members and guests attended the great Sarasota convention. Details in the March-April issue.

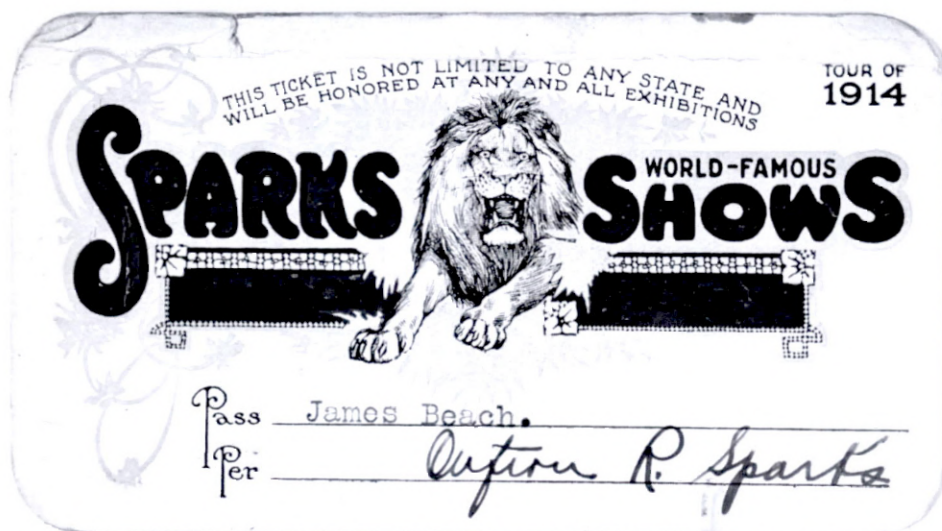
SEASON TICKETS

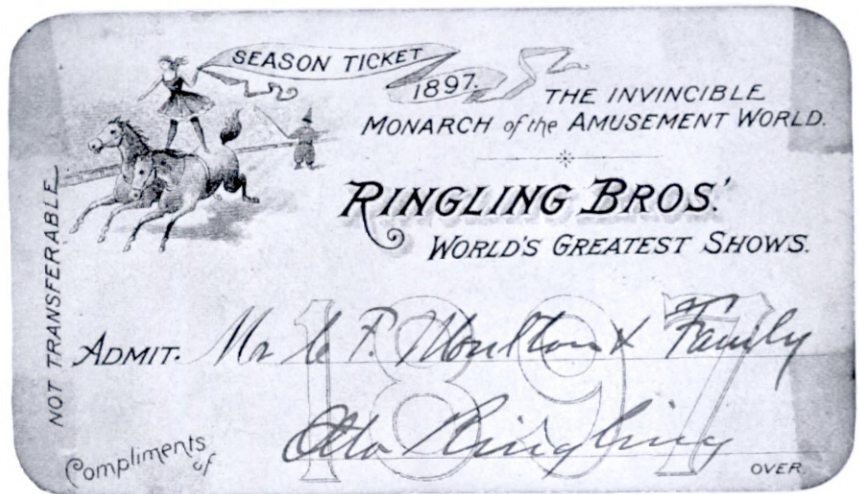
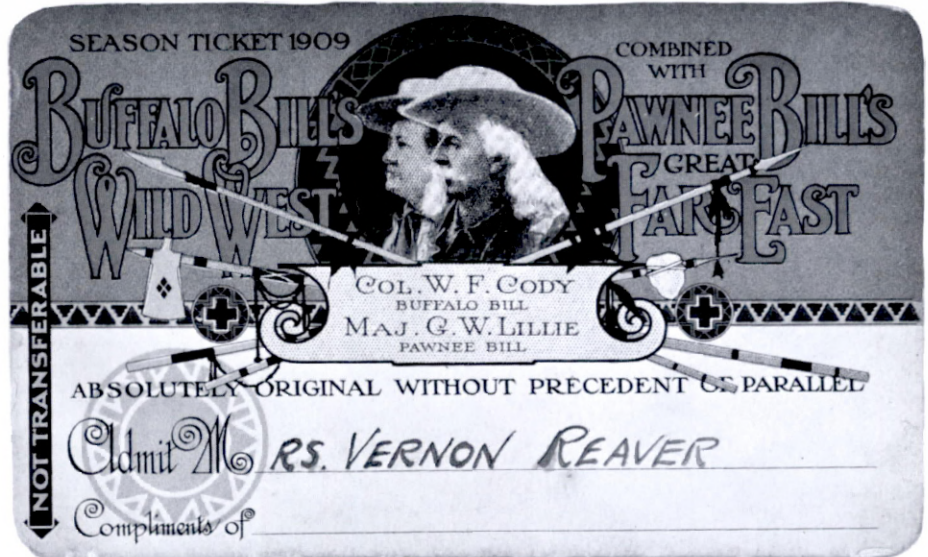
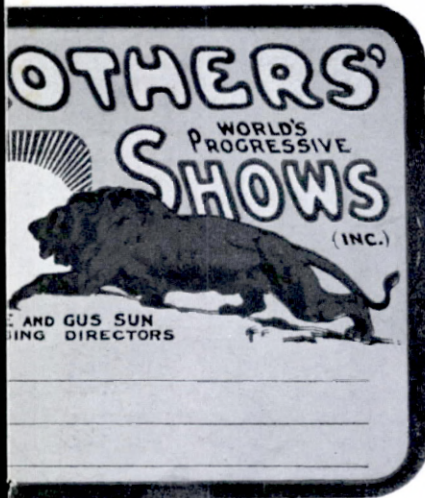
In addition to the long and short passes handed out by press agents to newspaper people, by lithographers; to building owners and by agents and 24 hour men to public officials, circuses have always had a "season ticket," for VIPs and visiting showmen. The season passes all seem to have had round corners and were printed on pasteboard. The design was usually the same as the full color design of the show's letterhead. Often they had some gold ink along with the other bright colors. The season appeared on the face in most cases. A few shows issued lifetime passes, and in 1949 Jack Tavlin made up lifetime passes for the Cole Bros. Circus that were stamped in red on a brass plate. This pass has a drawing of the America steam calliope in the inauguration parade of Harry Truman, January 20, 1949. It is not known if the new owners of the Cole show honored the pass in 1950. In 1928 Clint

Finney, general agent of the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West provided a leather case with each pass.

The lithograph companies usually printed the season tickets and used the same copy on the back of most tickets issued by the various circuses. The copy read, "The acceptor agrees to make use of it at every possible opportunity. Also to demand the best with the show, and to register a complaint if not obtained, and to feel that they are most welcomed visitors to the show, because of their being personal friends of _____," (the name of the circus).

Season tickets are a most interesting part of any circus collection, the degree of fancy design and printing usually indicated the pride of the show owner. All of these tickets are from the Pfening Collection.





Inside Workings Of A Great Circus

By James Saxon Childers

Vernon Reaver was one of dozens, if not hundreds, of men who held a variety of middle-level management jobs in outdoor show business. Starting out in 1904 as an usher in a Des Moines, Iowa, opera house, he soon rose to treasurer of a number of theaters in Des Moines. In 1910 he trouped-out as treasurer of Fred Buchanan's Yankee Robinson Circus, and later worked on a number of outdoor shows including John Robinson, Al G. Barnes, World Bros., and Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, where he was secretary to Charles Ringling from 1924 to 1926. He held many positions, treasurer, auditor, general agent, contracting agent, and during the 1919 season he owned a small Tom Show with Harry Kelly.

This article was originally published in the Birmingham (Alabama) News-Age-Herald of 28 September 1930. While certainly trying to present his profession in the best possible light, Reaver's comments on grift ring true, surely the result of his association with Fred Buchanan and Mugivan and Bowers.

"You go out there and you see a tented city, you see the bright lights and you hear the cries of the ballyhoo men. You probably don't stop to think of the amazing organization that is necessary before a circus can give two shows daily. Very few men know the truth about the circus business."

And one of those men is Vernon Reaver, manager of the Ritz Theater in Birmingham. For 16 years Reaver traveled with different circuses. He started in a lowly position. He resigned when he was secretary to one of the owners of the greatest show on earth. For 16 years he studied and served the circus.

"But long before I went out with a show," Reaver said, as he sat in his office at the Ritz one night last week, "I was dreaming about them. To me there was no glamour like the tinsel and the glitter of a circus. At that time I didn't know the facts about the business; I just dreamed about the elephants and the lions and the aerial acts and all the rest of it."

"Then I went out with a show. I have been on the road with virtually every big circus. I learned the racket from feeding the elephants to being secretary to Charles Ringling." Reaver looked out of his window. He looked out at the lights of Second



Vernon Reaver stands at the door of the white ticket wagon of Ringling-Barnum in 1925.

Avenue. "And now that I've been away from it four years—I still dream about it."

Reaver's first interest in the circus was at the age of 1. It was at this time that his mother held him in her lap as

The advance car of Fred Buchanan's rough and tumble Yankee Robinson Circus in 1914. Reaver spent four years on Yankee Robinson, where he received his first tutoring in the circus business from the wily Buchanan. Pfening Collection.



she sat in the front row of seats at a little one-ring circus in Iowa. The very youthful Reaver indicated his later profession by declaring that a certain four-footed animal that went prancing by was a "horse." It was the first word he ever spoke.

"And if my dreams come true," Reaver said last week, "it'll be my last."

When Vernon was 14 his family was living in Des Moines, Iowa. The boy got a job as usher in one of the theaters. Later he became head usher. Two of his assistants were young fellows named Conrad Nagel and Raymond "Spin" Hatton.

In 1908 Vernon was 18. Elliott Dexter came to Des Moines in a show called "Under the Greenwood Tree." He offered Vernon the job of being the show's treasurer. The young man took it. He started out on his first season on the road. Two weeks later he was on Broadway. At the end of the season he returned to Des Moines.

Back once more in his home town he became treasurer of the Princess Theater. A position he held only a few months. When he left he was followed by Tom Watters, and Tom Watters years later came to Birmingham to be associated with A Browne Parkes at the old Jefferson Theater, and still later in Watters' life he wrote the great stage success "Burlesque."

Reaver left the Princess because Fred Buchanan, a circus man, offered the young fellow a job of bookkeeper and timekeeper.

"I'd been hanging around his circus lot ever since the first wagon appeared," Reaver said. "Buchanan had seen me around there. He talked with me. I told him about my ambition of being a circus man. He said he'd take



me on, board me and give me \$12 a week. I grabbed the job. That was the beginning."

One year Reaver served as timekeeper. Then Buchanan made him treasurer of the show. The salary was doubled.

"The day I heard I was to get \$25 a week I felt a lot richer than Henry Ford ever felt in his life. I bought a watch chain three times as heavy as the one I had been wearing."

In 1911 the Buchanan circus was in Des Moines. There were three particularly famous men in Des Moines at that time. They ran a gambling house. Their names were Abe Zelcer and the Levy brothers. Years later these gamblers were to frame a world series, to wreck a ball team, to ruin the careers of Eddie Cicotte, Joe Jackson and a number of other stars, and at the same time to shake the faith of the nation in the great national game. But in 1911 they were merely Des Moines gamblers.

Into Abe Zelcer's place one morning Vernon Reaver was called to meet George F. Meighan. Reaver introduced Meighan to Buchanan. Buchanan engaged him as general agent for his show. Today Meighan is the most important person in the circus world. He is the general agent—which means the absolute boss—of all the Ringling circus interests.

In 1914 Reaver left Buchanan and went with the Robinson Famous Shows. Three years later he was with the John Robinson Circus. In 1920 he was with Howe's Great London Circus. In 1921 he was general agent for the Palmer Brothers Circus. In 1922 he was employed by three different circuses. And in 1923 he went with Ringling Brothers. He was with the Ringlings four years—with them until Jan. 1, 1927, when he came to Birmingham to take charge of the Ritz Theater.

"And I guess in all those years of

This ticket wagon on the Howe's Great London Circus in 1920 later went to Robbins Bros. It is now at the Circus World Museum. Reaver was assistant manager of the Howe's show in 1920. Pfening Collection.

experience I learned something about the circus business. You see, running a circus for me wasn't merely like selling suits of clothes or building a house. It was kind of a passion. I loved the circus. I loved everything about it. I still do."

"All right, then, Mr. Reaver, you're in for an hour or two of talking. I know what it is to go to the circus. I know what it is to walk along the sideshows. I've listened to the barkers many times. I know what it is to buy my ticket and go through the menagerie and on into the big top. Almost everyone has had those experiences. But I don't understand what makes the wheels go round. I don't understand that amazing business organization behind the circus, the organization about which you spoke in the beginning."

"It's a long story," Reaver said, "and one that has hundreds of angles. But I'll try to tell you some of the more interesting ones."

"Let's begin with the circus in Winter quarters. At that time there are only a few workmen and animal men employed. These fellows keep the buildings in repair, feed the animals, and on good days take them for walks. In Winter quarters the trainers spend most of their time training the ring stock for the next season's show. But that's about all that goes on. The Winter is a period for the animals to rest and the workmen to do no more work than is necessary."

"But that is not true of the owners and the superintendents. There's never any rest for these men. The general

public doesn't know that in the circus business no detail is ever left to chance. No circus run in a haphazard manner has ever been successful. In so far as is humanly possible every detail is cared for and every emergency is provided for.

"The Ringling show, for example, is a circus of four trains made up of 100 cars. There are 1,500 persons. There are 650 baggage horses. There are 150 head of ring stock, that is, 150 head of performing animals. There are 40 elephants.

"Despite the vastness of the organization there is never anything done except on schedule. There is not a stake driven, not a rope tied, not a wheel turned except in the proper order. And when weather or wreck or some other act of God breaks that schedule and that order, then there is an alternative routine that everyone understands and that everyone immediately begins to follow.

"I suppose you can understand that nothing can be left to chance when I tell you that it costs the Ringlings between \$16,000 and \$18,000 a day to operate during the time the circus is on the road. With that expenditure there must be perfect organization."

"Tell me," I said, "something about this organization. To an outsider it seems so vast that it's almost impossible to understand how it works at all."

"The reason," Reaver said, "is because everything is divided and divided again until you get down to the individual. There are dozens of superintendents with a circus. Each is an absolute czar in his own department. No one would dare interfere with the work of another."

"There's the equestrian director—he's the showmaster; there's the boss hostler—he's in charge of all the stock; there's the trainmaster, there's the animal boss, the boss property man, the boss canvasman and half a dozen others."

"Then under each boss are assistants. For example, the boss canvasman has several seat bosses for helpers. It's the duty of the seat man to get the seats up on schedule. Every detail of how the seats are to be erected has been worked out. The manager of the show holds the boss canvasman responsible. The canvasman holds the seat bosses responsible. And the seat bosses see that their workmen do the job on time. A circus is like an army—only it's better organized and it gets better results."

"Reaver," I said, "I think we're a little ahead of our story. We're already building the seats for the performance. Surely a lot goes on before the show arrives in a town. Isn't that right?"

"More than anyone who doesn't know could imagine," Reaver said. "In the Winter the general agent lays out the route of the show. Months are spent planning this. Then in the Spring it is



given to contracting agents. They go out 30 days ahead of the show.

"They make innumerable investigations. They study the financial conditions of the district of which each large city is the center. They find out the amount of money being spent in the town. When they come to Birmingham they learn how many furnaces are operating, how many men the steel plant is working. They study crop reports. They find out what day of the week is the biggest payday. They learn the dates for county and state fairs. They learn the dates of any state or city holidays. All these facts they write down in a detailed report.

"These contracting agents also make contracts for water and feed. They obtain the license. They rent the lot. They find out the best roads and the shortest. They draw a map and show where the train is to stop and the route to be followed by the wagons.

"Along with the advance agent, or immediately behind him, comes the 'banner squarer.'"

"The what?"

"The banner squarer. It's his business to go around town and pick out the walls and boards where he wants the circus banners, circus advertisements, to be put. He inspects a town most carefully and tries to rent every place he thinks a banner would show to advantage.

"One of his hardest duties is to compete with another circus. Sometimes he will be jumped from one town to another hundreds of miles away. This is done so that he can rent all the best wall and sign space and thus stop another circus from getting it.

"The banner squarer ordinarily is followed by the first advertising car. It is supposed to be 21 days ahead of the circus. It comes into town with 20 men or more. They are bill posters and lithographers. On the morning of the arrival the car is met by the bill posting companies of the city. The city bill posters go out with the circus men and

The steam calliope of the World Bros. Circus in 1923, had formally been on the Young Buffalo Wild West. Reaver was general agent for Fred Buchanan's World Bros. in 1923. Pfening Collection.

they work in teams. Automobiles take the bill posters out into the rural districts.

"One week after the brigade leave the second advance car comes into a town. It is 14 days ahead of the circus. The job of the second car is to look over the posters, to patch them where they've been torn, and to take up any space that has been overlooked.

"One week after the second advance car goes on, the press agents arrive in the town. They are seven days ahead of the circus. It is the job of the press agents to get as many stories in the newspapers as possible. These men usually are pleasant fellows who have had newspaper experience and can talk to newspaper men in their own language.

"The 'smart' press agent always carries around a good many passes. He's rather liberal with them in the editorial rooms of the paper. He hopes to make friends among the desk men and the reporters. This friendship he hopes to turn into stories about his circus.

"The last of the vanguard is the 24-hour man. He arrives in the city on the last day before the circus. He checks up on everything. He ascertains that there will be sufficient water. He checks the food for the workmen and the performers and he checks the feed for the animals.

"His final big job is to meet the trains as they come in and to lay the route from the railroad crossing to the field where the performance is to be given."

"Ringling Brothers & Barnum & Bailey Circus is moved on four trains. The first is called 'the squadron.' It leaves daily at 9 p.m. It carries the cook house, the stables, the stable wagons, and enough men and horses to move it.

On this train rides the superintendent of the circus, the manager. With the manager goes the lot superintendent.

"When the train arrives at the town where the next show is to be given, the lot superintendent looks over the field and tells where the different tents are to be placed. After the field has been laid out, the laborers then begin to drive the stakes.

"The second train hauls the side shows, the menagerie cages, the canvas wagons, and enough horses and men to move it.

"The third is the lumber train. In it are the seat wagons, the property wagons, and enough horses and men to move it.

"The fourth train is made up of sleeping cars that are used by performers, ticket sellers and the elite of the circus. With this train go the elephant cars and the cars carrying the ring stock.

"By the time the fourth train arrives in a city, the cook tent is up and breakfast is being served. In the morning the tents are put up and by afternoon the show is ready to be given.

"At night, the first wagon to leave the ground on its way back to the train carries a number of torches. A superintendent rides on it. At every corner where a turn is to be made, a torch is placed. If the turn is to the right, the torch is placed at the right. All other wagons take their direction from these torches. The last wagon is called the chandelier wagon—that's because it carries all the circus lights—and it collects the torches.

"Tell me," I asked, "something about the life with a circus. What about the morals? What about the thieving and the crookedness that one hears about?"

"You've been reading Jim Tully's 'Circus Parade,'" Reaver answered. "That book is misleading. It picks out a few happenings, which may or may not have taken place, and it reports them as if they were daily occurrences on circus lots.

"As a matter of fact, the morals of circus people are no different from the morals of any other. Most of the girls are married. Those who are not are protected by an old circus tradition that no man goes with a woman in the show. I've been with some circuses where you were fired if you were seen just talking with a woman with the show. And I remember one circus where there was a ballet of 70 girls. They were looked after by an old man and his wife. Every night at 10—which was right after their act—the roll was called and if a girl was missing, it was just too bad for her. She got fired.

"I don't mean to say that circus people were or are angels, but I do honestly contend that their standard of morals is quite as high as that of any other group of individuals.

"As for the gambling, there used to

be a good deal of it. On a train was a car which was called the 'privilege car.' In it was a bar and all kinds of gambling games. A man could go in there and get as drunk as he liked or he could lose as much money as he liked. But if he got drunk too often or if he lost too much money, then the superintendents got rid of him."

"But surely," I said, "there has always been a lot of grafting about a circus. All the tales of their crookedness couldn't have grown out of nothing."

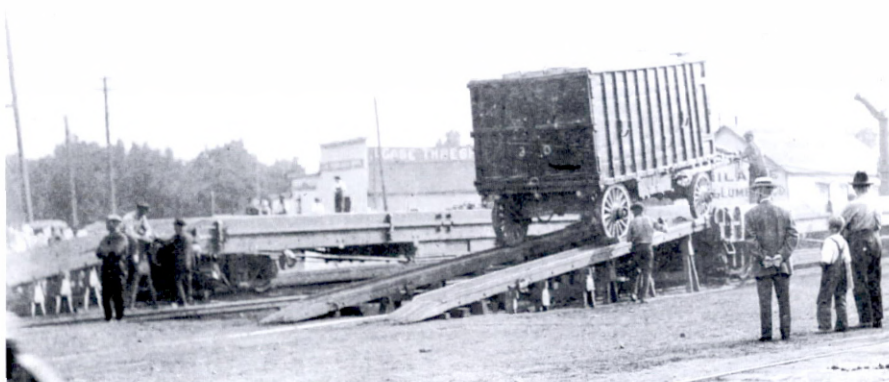
"I'll admit that," Reaver said, "but for goodness sake understand me on this. With the two great shows there has never been any organized stealing. I don't mean to say that there hasn't been an occasional crook with them, but I give you my word that these fellows were fired just as fast as they were discovered. At present the circus business has been so cleaned up that you can go to one of them with no more fear of being short changed or of having your pocket picked than when you go to a baseball game or into a 10-cent store."

"The way the graft was worked in the old days was for the ticket seller at the main entrance to size up a man's bankroll. If it was a little one, the ticket agent paid no attention to that particular man. But if the roll was a big one he would say: 'I take it, my good friend, that you want to go all the way through.' Then he'd lean over and stick a ticket, like a railway conductor's ticket, in the man's hatband. There were different color tickets which indicated the amount of money the ticket seller estimated was in the man's purse—a red ticket announced that the man had about \$100, a blue ticket indicated \$50.

This ticket in the man's hatband told every employee of the circus that the man had money and was a desirable person to steal from. Scores of tricks were played to get his money.

"One of the most common was for the reserve seat man to stop him. 'You want a reserved seat, my good friend,' he'd say. Then the reserved seat man would open a conversation. How were the crops? How were the cattle? Fine baby, very fine baby. And similar questions and comments. Then would come the declaration that the reserved seat man had more small bills than he could use and that he would appreciate a big bill in exchange for some of them. He would take the proffered \$20 bill and while he talked with the rube he'd fold the bill several times. Then he'd change the 20 and take a \$1 bill into his hand. After he'd done that he would decide that he didn't need any big bill and he would supposedly return the 20, though in reality it would be the \$1 bill. He'd jolly the rube a bit more and send him on his way.

"But before he did so, he would tear a



The third section of the Ringling-Barnum train loading the flats in the middle 1920's when Reaver was on the show. Pfening Collection.

corner off the reserved seat tickets. That would tip the ticket take the ticket out of the man's hat, tear a bit off it and return it to place. That would warn everyone else to leave that man alone. He had already been robbed and the thieves didn't want him to pull out his money. They feared he might miss the \$20 that had been stolen from him.

"Probably the most common device in stealing was to palm a coin. The candy seller would show you 90 cents in change that was rightly coming to you. But when he turned it over into your hand he'd hold a quarter in his palm. The rube would take the money and put it in his pocket and never know his loss until it was too late.

"Another way of stealing that was popular was carried on by the ticket seller. Say, for example, that tickets were 75 cents each. A man would come to the window and ask for three tickets. The seller knew that the man buying the tickets had been saying to himself: 'Three tickets at 75 cents each will cost me \$2.25.' He had that amount in his mind. He was thinking \$2.25. Therefore you handed him his ticket and while you were talking real fast you'd count him out \$2.25 change. You'd do it with a flourish and since the man would be thinking that amount anyhow he'd take it and go away. Thus you'd be able to steal 50 cents from him.

"One of the big grafts in Canada used to be giving American nickles for Canadian quarters. In those days the Canadian nickles were real small. Before a circus would go into Canada everybody would load up on American nickles. They'd be passed out in change as quarters. It took the Canadians years to catch on.

"But, honestly, that's gone now. I don't mean to say it's all cleaned out. Of course, it isn't. They still palm coins on you at the circus. But so they do at any place where there's a crowd."

"One more thing," I said, "and we'll quit. What's the future of the circus?"

Each year one reads about this circus—or that circus going out of business—does that mean that in times to come they'll all be gone?"

"Absolutely not. Many persons thought that when the morning parade ceased the circus was doomed. That wasn't true. The parades had to be stopped because of traffic conditions in cities. Once automobiles came in, then parades had to be stopped.

"A number of prophets have said the circus was through. But it isn't through. It never will be so long as boys and girls are boys and girls and so are men and women. All of us still have a childish interest in wild animals."

RINGLING MUSEUM NEW BUILDING OPEN

To commemorate the opening of the new Museum of the Circus, the entire Ringling Museums complex was open free of charge on Saturday, January 15, 1977. A reception was held on the evening of January 14 to declare the official opening. Members of the Museum, the Showfolks of Sarasota and Circus Fans Association attended the joyous event.

A special event on January 15 was the presentation of the Head Bros. Miniature Circus, set up out of doors in front of the Circus Museum. Herbert Head created and assembled the replica of Cole Bros. Circus in the 1930s.

On January 23, 1977, the Ringling Museum of the Circus honored Jack Joyce, as the latest in their tributes to Sarasota Circus Celebrities.

WANTED

- Color slides of RBBB and other rail shows prior to 1956
- Pre-1966 issues of *The Bandwagon*
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THE CIRCUS YEAR IN REVIEW

By Don Marcks

1976

The year 1976 started on an optimistic note and owners were eager to get their shows on the road. After all, it was the nation's 200th Birthday and people everywhere, they reasoned, would be eager to celebrate and spend their money.

Exciting show programs, featuring Bi-centennial themes were promised. Revivals of wild west-type shows were planned, all aimed at appealing to circus-goers who would want to reflect back on the early days of America.

James M. Cole's Circus had a successful January tour and this provided encouragement for other showmen. Charles Germaine, who had created the Miller-Johnson Circus, then sold it to Cliff Vargas, who promptly renamed it Circus Vargas, announced he would be back with a new show late in the year.

Turn-away crowds were on hand for each performance of the annual Cal-Tech Circus at Pasadena, Calif. - Whitey Black was named manager of King Bros. Circus, and the nation was talking about "Oliver", that strange ape/man creature.

There were rumors that Circus World Theme Park wouldn't reopen. However, Mattel soon announced it was spending \$3.5 million to renovate the park and it reopened in the spring.

Accidents occurred early in the year - Doc Henderson suffered a broken arm while loading RBBB horses at the

The art work on the King Bros. Circus was unusually outstanding during the 1976 season. This view of the ticket wagon was taken in Zanesville, Ohio, on June 28. Don Nieman Photo.



Newspaper advertisement for Roberts Bros. Circus stand at Norvelt, Pa., May 21, 1976. Mike Piccollo Collection.

show's quarters in Venice, Fla. (Later in the year he would undergo heart surgery). - Elvin Bale suffered broken bones when he was crushed between two horses - Carla Wallenda's high

sway pole collapsed shortly after it had been set-up.

As early as January observers were noting that competition was going to be rough this year. Four shows were setting dates close to each other for the Cincinnati area. Royal Hanneford won a contract to produce an October Circus for the Cleveland Shrine, but first Kaye Continental would play a spring date for that same Shrine club.

By February the season was well underway. Royal Hanneford was playing big dates - Stebbing's were set for a long tour - RBBB's Blue Unit was featuring Europe's Ursula Botcher and her polar bears, while the Red Unit featured super star Gunther Gebel-Williams - Fisher Bros. were in Texas - Polack was making its usual early dates - Fleckles and Hubler were starting their opening engagements.

By the middle of the month Ted Stewart (aerialist) had been injured and his part was being handled by a newcomer, who would later be injured in a fall. Fisher Bros. was sold to Johnny Frazier, who kept the show out until winter. - Franzen Bros. were in Texas - the Coronas Circus was in Florida - M&M was in Rochester - Int'l All Star was in Georgia - Wm. Kay was in Wisconsin.

When Hoxie Tucker announced the opening dates for his two shows (Hoxie Bros. and Hoxie's Great American) he made headlines with the announcement that both shows would feature a gorilla. They proved to be strong attractions all year long.

It was a year of constant rumors. The most persistent of these concerned the

The Stebbing Royal European Circus was a highlight of the CFA convention in Dallas, Texas. This photo was taken by Ed Jones at the convention.





This air conditioned cage used to house Mongo on the Hoxie show was originally built for Toto on the Ringling-Barnum Circus. Extensive repairs placed it in first class condition. Photo taken in Atlanta, Ga., October 10, 1976. Photo by Joe Bradbury.

possible sale of Beatty-Cole and the debut of a third RBBB unit. Officials either refused to comment or ignored the reports. You could find as many people who swore the stories were true as you could who claimed they were false. By the end of the year Beatty-Cole was planning a new season and there was no sign of RBBB's third unit.

The winter flu struck heaviest among show folks. Everyone either had it, was just getting over it or coming down with it. In some cases acts were stricken while working and were thus forced to make hasty exits. Needless to say this caused many headaches for those who were planning show programs.

Garden Bros. was playing early dates - Dailey Bros. was in Texas - Beatty-Cole, King and Sells & Gray were prepping for their tours - The Shrine Circus at Phoenix presented an old time circus parade - Gatti-Charles opened with a strong show, played a long season and continually added new dates for their 1977 tour.

The Emmett Kelly, Jr. Circus announced plans for setting up a permanent circus facility in New York City, something that never materialized. The circus suffered financial problems during its Bi-centennial July 4th date at Philadelphia, was attached by the performers and forced to shut down. Later the show reopened, played spot dates and by the end of the year was back on a regular schedule.

The Shrine Circus was on at Youngstown - Holiday Hippodrome was in the South - Kaye Cont'l was in Chicago - Hubler was in Illinois - John Strong was in Calif. - Circus Vargas opened in Alabama - Mid America was in the central states - Pan American was in Florida - Patterson Bros. was in Michigan - The CFA announced its 50th anniversary convention would be

held on the Stebbing Circus in Dallas.

For the first time in its history the George-Matthews Circus opened on the east coast and from its first day the show was plagued by problems. Show mechanics worked around the clock to keep things moving as wrecks, breakdowns and bad weather were daily occurrences. At Birmingham a lion escaped and eluded capture for some time. Twice trainer Pancho Magana was attacked by the lions, the second time he was hospitalized for several weeks and ringmaster Ed Russell took over the cat act. Finally, the show shut down to recoup, then moved into Akron and there owner Sid Kellner threw in the towel and closed the show. It was said that trucks and equipment were strewn all over the country.

Castle was on the west coast - Gatti was in Texas, then moved to California

Hoxie Tucker's presentation of gorillas on his two circuses proved to be highly successful. Mongo, shown here was on the Hoxie show in 1976. Hoxie Bros. Circus Photo.



This air conditioned cage semi carried Kongo, the gorilla, on the all new Hoxie's Great American Circus in 1976. Photo taken in West Jefferson, Ohio. Pfening Photo.

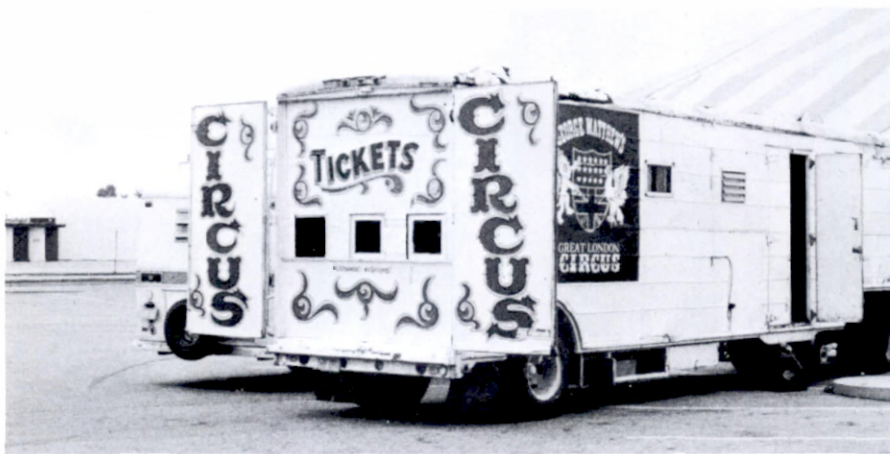
- Paul Kaye set up a circus at California's Lion Country Safari Park - Emmett Kelly, Jr. Circus jumped into Puerto Rico - Hubler and Pan American were announcing 1977 dates - Wallace & Rogers were in the Pacific Northwest.

Tex Maynard's new Wild West Show made its debut in Florida to good reviews, but never made another date. Later, he was located working on another show. Sarasota's City Council tried to pass a law that would prohibit circuses and carnivals from playing within its city limits, but a last minute effort on the part of local show folks forced the Council to give the idea up. In San Francisco a city worker's strike stopped the city and almost prevented Polack Bros. from playing their annual date in the city's auditorium. Last minute pleas by the Shrine Club finally swayed the strikers who agreed to let the circus play without interruption.

A member of the Feller Boys & Do Do wire act was injured when he fell while completing a trick - Sells & Gray's canvas truck was destroyed by fire, and the show's brand new big top was also lost.

Mid America was in Texas - Shrine dates were on in Maine - Circus Vargas was in California - Sam T. Polack was in Arkansas - Royal Hanneford was in New York State - Gladys Black was named manager of Carson & Barnes, replacing Ted Bowman who went home because he was ill - Wally Naghtin, of Circus Vargas, was attacked by one of his bears and suffered a broken leg.

Lewis Bros. Circus light plant burned on the highway as firemen stood by and watched. They couldn't touch it, they said, because the truck was on the wrong side of the county line. - Hanneford signed to play New Orleans - Sam T. Polack was rained out at Columbia, S.C.



The George Matthews Great London Circus had a rocky starting and stopping tour in 1976. This photo taken in Colum-

bus, Ohio, shows the ticket wagon on a discount store parking lot in front of a two pole big top. Pfening Photo.



One of the most interesting tented operas out in 1976 was the Diamond S Rodeo, booked by Merle Johnson. In a canopy top that brought back memories of

Miller Bros. 101 Ranch, the show featured the John Herriott family. It was sold to Hoxie Tucker in November. Pfening Photo.



The Big John Strong & Son Circus made its usual eastern trek in 1976, this photo

was made on the Columbus, Ohio, lot in late June. Pfening Photo.

Showtime USA made its debut in Texas, played for nine days and then folded, leaving acts stranded and

broke. Later plans were announced for a reopening that didn't come off.

Hetzer's Circus was on the east coast

- Famous Hunt was in New Jersey - Olympic Int'l was in Nashville - Hubler was in Michigan - Sells & Gray in Florida - Paul Kaye in Detroit - Fleckles in Conn. - Carden-Johnson in mid-west (they bought out Clyde Bros. and at times were operating three shows) - Hoxie in the South - Castle in Indianapolis - M&M in Nebraska.

Circus Galaxy made its debut in Texas in May, played a few dates and then shut down. Some of the acts would later try to make it on their own under the title Circus Union 76, but it was a futile try. - Not long afterwards the new Berosini Circus also folded.

Gatti moved into the northwest - Castle in Canada - Mid America in Oklahoma - Hamid-Morton in New Jersey - Voorheis and Carden Johnson in Michigan - RBBB was reshuffling dates - Circus Int'l in Maryland - Great Y Circus in California - Circus Vargas made a splash across the country with a special feature story in Time magazine.

John Strong in Texas - Wallace & Rogers fighting rain - Hoxie in Illinois - Europorama's tour ends in Wisconsin, with reports that business was off.

As the RBBB Red Unit train moved through New York's Selkirk yards it was rammed by some cement cars being switched and one car was destroyed. (June 7). Later in Kentucky three flat cars were damaged and in Louisiana some coaches were derailed. Two sway pole artists performing at Myrtle Beach, S.C. fell and were seriously injured.

Gatti-Charles played a July 4th show at Anaheim, Calif. - Fisher Bros. were in Michigan - Happytime was playing west coast fairs.

Lewis Bros. Circus fought a brave fight against many problems including a blowdown and then finally in late June they closed.

On May 9th, the Amandis Troupe called it quits. The girls had gotten married and wanted to be off with their husbands, so the troupe took its final bows on the Olympic Int'l Circus at Huntsville. Gunnar and Helen have since set up their own agency office.

When RBBB went into New Orleans' huge Super Dome they worked in front of a new set-up, as far as seating was concerned. It was a closed-in format, to bring the audience closer to the performance and cut out the huge expanse of open space.

In a speech to Shriners Hubert Castle charged they were selling circus tickets too cheap. "You can't do it at the same prices you charged 15 years ago," he said.

Sway pole artist Charles Nock died on June 3rd after reportedly choking on some food at his home in Florida. He had just returned from a tour of the Orient and Australia, where he appeared with the Peter Pan show.

A record of 25,378 paid admissions were recorded by Circus Vargas for its

four shows at Corona, Calif. on May 25-26.

On June 27th, a violent tornado-type storm struck the Sam T. Polack Circus at Wheaton, Ill., completely destroying the huge big top, which had been rented from Harold Barnes. Fortunately the show was over and the tear-down was in progress. No serious injuries were reported.

John Strong's concession trailer was wrecked in Kentucky - Fisher Bros. had a sick elephant, the result of drinking several cans of paint. It eventually recovered and was able to rejoin the show.

Canada's new DuBois Circus was doing well - Sells & Gray were getting rave reviews - TNT & Royal Olympic were busy - Agents were looking for human freaks and oddities for upcoming film work - Wm. Kay was in the Pacific Northwest area.

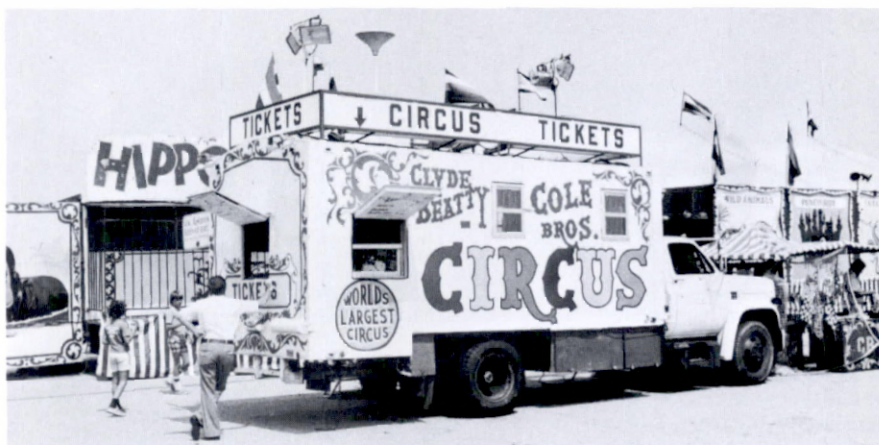
Daily Bros. received bad publicity and complaints from officials in two states and reportedly were asked to leave. At Jeannette, La., they made headlines again when an elephant ran away and in Iowa headlines were gained when a huge snake got away and eluded capture for several days.

Carson & Barnes was carrying the largest menagerie on the road. Early in the year they had many problems - an elephant died; their gas truck exploded and burned, and on June 12th a gang descended upon the show at Chester, Pa. raising havoc on the lot and finally killing the show's prized leopard. The show moved into the east coast area for the first time, found the going rough and eventually headed back into more familiar territory. They had problems with the Missouri State Police when they tried to avoid a highway scale at Republic and then worked in a snowstorm on their closing day.

Circus Vargas moved into Canada for a tour that was proclaimed as "highly successful" despite huge outlays of cash for road and income taxes. They even announced plans for a return to Canada in 1977. They were one of the few shows playing the northern country that didn't run afoul of the law because of crackdowns on phone room promotions.

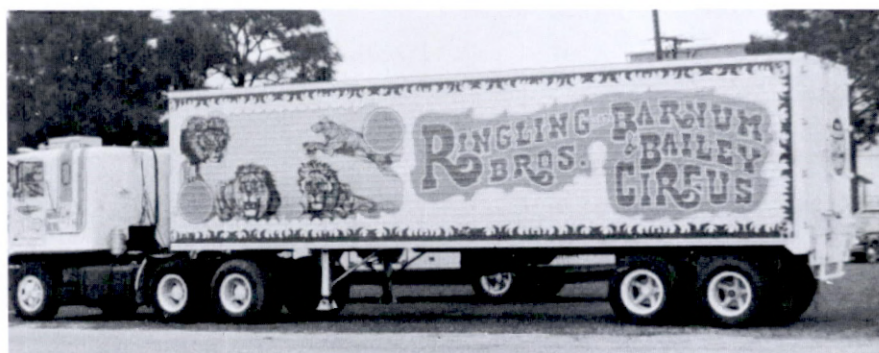
Circus Vargas rolled into New York City to play an extended date, which found the show setting up on a lot in Spanish Harlem. Before the first day was over it was obvious the move was a mistake. Guards with dogs and a fence were required to prevent looting and damage by local gangs. The show stayed just long enough to film a segment of TV's "Today Show", then hastily loaded up and dashed off to the next stand.

By the middle of the year it was obvious that the Bicentennial was a fizzle. The cost of living, inflation and unemployment continued to climb and people were holding onto what money



The ticket wagon of the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus was lettered most attractively for the 1976 season. It is the only

piece of equipment remaining from the original Beatty railroad show that went off the road in 1956. Pfening Photo.



This beautifully lettered truck is owned by the Sells-Floto Co., which has the concessions on both units of the Ringling-

Barnum Circus. It is pictured here in Venice, Fla. quarters just before Christmas 1976. Pfening Photo.



The Carson & Barnes Circus used this marquee purchased from the Circus World Museum on its midway in 1976. This photo

was taken in Logan, Ohio, when the show was on its way back from the first tour of the east in many years. Pfening Photo.

they had. Some shows were openly admitting that business was down, others refused to admit it, but a visit to any circus lot proved that crowds weren't what they were said to be.

Rumors were circulating regularly and new ones continued to pop up during the second half of the year. Virtually none were denied and by the

end of the year it was obvious that many of the rumors had been based on facts.

In July, Rudy Bros. was in Cincinnati - Paul Kaye played a July 4th date at the Rose Bowl - George Hanneford had two shows, one in New York and one at the Circus Hall of Fame - Simone Finner had a holiday show in



Marsha Hunt Jones brought the popular Hunt's Famous Circus title to familiar fans of the east coast in 1976. This photo was taken in Clinton, Mass. Charles Amidon Photo.



John Lewis again operated his Lewis Bros. Circus for a short tour in the spring of 1976. This view of the big top was taken in Villarica, Ga. on April 30. Joe Bradbury Photo.



The Circus Vargas was truly the most outstanding and massive circus on tour in 1976. Criss crossing the country with its Hagenbeck-Wallace sized big top the

show chalked up giant grosses. The midway is shown here in Burbank, Ca. Pfening Photo.



George Hanneford, Jr. operated a second unit under this big top at the Circus Hall of Fame, Sarasota, Fla. during the entire 1976 season. Pfening Photo.

Hollywood - The Pickle Family Circus was in San Francisco.

Sandy Dobritch launched his own show "Super Circus USA" and promptly ran into a series of problems which eventually forced him to close. George Barreda was attacked by lions during a Clyde Bros. performance on July 10th at La Crosse, Wisc. - Roman Schmitt introduced his trained rhino, a

first in the U.S. - the Beatty-Cole chimps ran away at Poughkeepsie.

Polack Bros. was in Washington - Fleckles in Milwaukee - Pan American in New Jersey - Royal Bros. in Canada - Hoxie in Ohio - Early American in California - Sells & Gray in New York - Int'l All Star in Illinois - Henry Bros. in Arizona.

RBBB star Emilia Ivanova, achieved

a "first" at Inglewood, Calif., when she accomplished a quadruple somersault to a high perch chair. About the same time The Flying Ferris had a mid-air collision and had to lay off for a few weeks.

Mid America in Illinois - Diamond S Rodeo in Michigan (By the end of the year the show would be sold to Hoxie Tucker) - TNT and John Strong both in Denver - John Strong returns to U.S. from a Canadian tour - Circus Kirk battling heavy rains.

The new Germaine show Page-Cavanaugh opened on the east coast, would then jump into California and wound up its first tour in bad weather in Utah. - A Diamond S. Rodeo bucking horse slid under a fence, ran into the



The Franzen Bros. Circus returned for a second season in 1976. This fine little Wisconsin circus moved most of the show, including its elephant in this large semi-trailer. Franzen Bros. Circus Photo.

Tom Cooper's paint job on this Ringling wagon is typical of his lettering of equipment on the big show. Photo taken in Venice quarters in December of 1976. Pfening Photo.

crowd and trampled several spectators.

Beatty-Cole had problems over a lot in Canfield, Ohio - A Circus Night band concert was held at Sheboygan Wisc. - the Fleckles show was in Illinois - Hubler in Kentucky - Wenatchee Youth Circus in Seattle - Circus Royal in New York - RBBB Red in Salt Lake City. - Paul Kaye in Honolulu.

RBBB's Blue Unit midjets were married in Oakland, Calif. (Aug. 27). Then when the show jumped into Fresno, Brenda (Cuttin) Jones, who worked on an aerial motorcycle act, fell and was killed in the fall. (Sept. 8).

Carden-Johnson sold three of its extra elephants to Circus Vargas and then placed one of its two wild animal acts up for sale.

Big John was in Indiana - Klein's Attractions produced the Ohio State Fair Circus - Paul Wright had a show in Southern California - Olympic Int'l was in Tennessee - DeWayne was flown into Barrows, Alaska - TNT took a week off - Wallace & Rogers were in Alaska.

Aerialist catcher Ron Lemus and Mike McCardell were killed while doing stunt flying over Las Vegas - Circus Day at the Dallas Fair - John Strong back in California - Wm. Kay in Florida - Hoxie Bros. lost their stake driver and trailer at Gastonia, N.C. on Oct. 5th - Shrine show at Cleveland - Carson & Barnes in Texas - Polack on east coast - RBBB in Chicago - Early American Circus playing a Pumpkin Festival.

Franzen Bros. winds up its season and goes into the barn in Wisconsin. -



Carson & Barnes in Kansas - Many acts scheduled for a Mexican tour had their contracts cancelled when the Peso was devalued. - Beatty-Cole in New Orleans.

During a performance of the Shrine Circus at San Antonio (Nov. 21) high wire artist Gene Mendez slipped and fell and suffered only arm injuries - Patterson Bros. in Michigan - Polack Bros. was reportedly sold to unnamed buyers, but by the end of the year the sale had not become official - Dixiana show was sold to Pete Luvas and Gary Strong - Gordon Walsh, of Mid America launched his own show called Kelly Bros.

As the year came to a close several small Christmas shows were making successful Holiday tours. Circus Vargas closed the season with a three week layoff and Ringling-Barnum's Red Unit was just starting on its new tour. Beatty-Cole was preparing all three of its shows for a '77 season and most owners were setting plans for the coming year. Some though, would be cutting their usually long tours by several weeks.

One must admire show owners and promoters for they are an optimistic bunch. Despite the problems of 1976, all were happy that a new Administration had been elected in November.

The Sells & Gray Circus had to pull its old square end big top out of storage after a new top was destroyed in a truck wreck in April of 1976. This photo was taken in Griffin, Ga. on May 1. Joe Bradbury Photo.

Their general feeling was "this will be good for all of us."

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